



## Helping members prepare for the OSCE

A guide for UNISON reps

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## **Introduction**

The low pass rate of candidates sitting the nursing or midwifery objective structured clinical examination (OSCE) is a matter of real concern to UNISON. Between April 2015 and January 2017, only 56% (2,136) of candidates passed the examination. UNISON believes this pass rate needs to improve.

As a result of concerns about the OSCE process raised by UNISON and others the NMC is currently looking at the 'customer journey' experienced by those going through the overseas route to see how the current process could be improved and will be speaking to stakeholders to get their views.

As part of this work, the NMC has reviewed the six months exclusion period after a second failed attempt. Following discussions with UNISON and other key stakeholders, the NMC has reduced the six month exclusion period to three months to enable registrants who started their application from 6 April 2017 to have three attempts at the OSCE, as part of one application.

In light of this change UNISON has issued this guidance to help reps and branches who are dealing with members who are overseas nurses or midwives preparing to take the OSCE examination or who have failed their second or third attempt.

## **Requirements for overseas trained nurses or midwives to work in the UK**

Overseas trained nurses or midwives wanting to work in the UK must register with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC). Since October 2014, a nurse or midwife trained outside the European Economic Area, who wishes to work as a nurse in the UK, must pass the NMC test of competence that will assess their qualification, training and experience to check whether they are capable of practising safely and effectively in the UK. This test considers whether the applicant has the necessary post-qualifying practice and experience in each appropriate area of nursing or midwifery and always consists of two parts.

Part 1 is a computer-based test (CBT). The CBT is a multiple-choice test and can be taken at a Pearson VUE test centre available in most countries around the world.

Part 2 is a nursing or midwifery objective structured clinical examination (OSCE) – a practical nursing or midwifery examination. The CBT must be passed before the OSCE can be taken. The OSCE is only available in the UK at a designated test centre.

### **Part 1 – CBT**

Once overseas applicants have completed the online self-eligibility assessment, they have up to six months to successfully complete the CBT. When this period expires, the application will close. The CBT tests their theoretical and practice-based knowledge. Applicants book the test directly with Pearson VUE, the NMC's independent CBT provider, at a test centre in their country of residence.

Applicants have a maximum of two attempts (an initial sitting and a re-sit) to pass the CBT with a minimum of 28 days between each sitting. Applicants who fail both attempts need to wait a minimum of six months before they can reapply for registration. Results will be emailed to candidates within 48 hours of taking the examination. The exam fee must be paid in full each time. The CBT is valid for two years.

Once applicants have passed the CBT and submitted all registration documents and evidence, the NMC reviews their full application to make sure that it meets the requirements for registration. If it does then the NMC sends confirmation to the applicant who can then proceed to the OSCE stage.

### **Part 2 – OSCE**

Applicants sit the OSCE in the UK at one of the NMC's approved university test centres - University of Northampton, Ulster University and Oxford Brookes University. Applicants contact the centre directly to book and pay for the OSCE.

The OSCE will simulate a clinical environment and patient scenarios which registered nurses and midwives are likely to encounter when they assess, plan, implement and evaluate care. The OSCE contains nursing or midwifery scenarios along with separate skill stations. Each separate clinical examination is known a 'station' and candidates will circulate through all the stations within a set time.

Each of the six stations has standardised marking criteria against which all candidates are assessed. This assessment is by a panel of examiners and will be filmed for quality assurance purposes.

Candidates are expected to demonstrate competence through safe and effective practice. The test of competence is based on current UK pre-registration standards. Applicants who started their application before 6 April 2017 have a maximum of two attempts (an initial

sitting and a full or partial re-sit) to pass the OSCE with a minimum of 10 working days between the first and second attempt. Results will be emailed to candidates within five working days of taking the examination.

If an applicant fails to achieve the required minimum score after both OSCE attempts, their application will close and they have to wait a minimum of six months before they can sit the OSCE again.

If an applicant would like to begin a new application ahead of the six months OSCE exclusion period they can do so.

Applicants applying after 6 April 2017 have a maximum of three attempts (an initial sitting, and two full or partial re-sits) at the OSCE, as part of one application.

If an applicant is unsuccessful at their first OSCE, they must wait a minimum of 10 working days before they can take the examination again. If an applicant is unsuccessful at their second OSCE, they must wait a minimum of three months from the date of their second attempt before they can take the OSCE for the third time.

If the applicant is unsuccessful after their three permitted attempts their application will close. They will be required to submit a new application but will not be able to sit the OSCE again for a minimum of six months.

Applicants wishing to start a new application should contact the NMC overseas enquiries mailbox to confirm CBT and IELTS validity and will be informed of the next steps. For public protection, the applicant will be required to provide more recent documentation as part of their new assessment.

## Preparing for the OSCE examination

This section provides you with information on how a candidate should prepare for the OSCE which you can pass on to UNISON members you are advising.

- Remember that you will have done many of these nursing or midwifery skills several times before.
- Example exam paperwork can be found on the test centres internal learning platform (NILE). The test centre recommend a minimum of 14 days to review the content of NILE but many candidates have highlighted more time is needed - make the most of the NILE site and resources.
- Read the candidate handbook for lots of useful information and further helpful tips.
- You are being assessed at UK pre-registration entry level; no advanced nursing skills are required to pass this assessment. If you know the basic skills of nursing or midwifery care the scenario will not matter.
- Remember to interact with the mannequin during the assessment – it is your patient, not the assessor.
- If you make a mistake do not panic, make sure you tell the assessor within the 15 minute assessment time, share what you would do to correct it and this will be taken into account. It won't be taken into account if you mention a mistake after the assessment has finished.
- You will be given an instruction booklet and you will be expected to either write a care plan or evaluation form. Read the front of the sheet and make sure you understand everything. Focus on the task and follow the requirements set out on the sheet. Candidates have sometimes missed out parts or key information in the past and this has resulted in a fail mark.
- You will need to take observations of the patient and record them on a National Early Warning Score (NEWS) chart prior to the assessment finishing. Ensure you are familiar with the NEWS procedure.
- You will have 15 minutes to write two aspects of care including any associated/relevant self-care. Ensure you are familiar with the NMC guidelines on records and record keeping.
- You will be implementing care such as drug administration or other nursing implementation. Ensure you are familiar with the NMC standards for drug administration.
- You will have 15 minutes to write a transfer/discharge or other form of nursing evaluation. Make sure your writing is clear, legible and that you answer the question. If we cannot read it or understand it we cannot mark it.
- When introducing yourself to the patient, introduce yourself as one of the nurses at the hospital not as an NMC applicant.
- Remember that this test is ultimately about patient safety.

The documents that will support your preparation are: 'How to prepare for the OSCE' and the 'Taking your OSCE'/'Candidate handbook'. Links to both of these documents can be found in the further information section of this guidance.

### **Common mistakes/errors during the OSCE examination**

This section provides you with some common things candidates often forget or miss during the OSCE examination. These include:

- Not checking the expiry date on drugs (and verbalising you have done so).
- Not demonstrating verbal and non-verbal communication when interacting with the mannequin.
- Not reading the scenarios or instructions accurately, eg defined timescales in which to plan care.
- Contamination of sterile field.
- Chest compressions are not deep enough.
- Not completing the paperwork or assessment requested within the 15 minutes.
- Touching the patient before conducting hand hygiene techniques.
- Not checking for allergies.
- Not checking patient identity.
- Overdosing the patient.

### **General tips and advice for the OSCE examination**

1. Try not to be nervous, stay calm - you know this.
2. Read, read and read again the paperwork for the stations and make sure you understand fully what is expected of you during the assessment.
3. The 'How to Prepare for your OSCE Examination' document, the 'Candidate Handbook' and the 'Information on NILE Cover' are what you will be assessed on and can expect at the centre. There are no surprises on the assessment day.
4. You do not need to bring anything with you for the exam, apart from your passport and the required documentation for your ID check with the NMC. You will be provided with pens (blue and black).
5. Water is available throughout the centre and exam if needed.
6. If you don't have a fob watch or forget to bring one, don't worry there are spares at the test centre which you can use.
7. Ensure you are presented as you would need to be in practice. This includes: no jewellery, long hair tied up, no nail polish, flat shoes and short sleeves. You can

arrive in your work tunic/scrubs if you wish.

8. When introducing yourself to the patient, introduce yourself as one of the nurses at the hospital not as an NMC applicant.
9. Make sure you have eaten before your OSCE assessment. You will be in the test centre for at least three hours; once you are registered you are not allowed to go outside of the centre.
10. Arrive in plenty of time to allow for traffic. It is recommended that you give yourself at least 30 minutes before the examination time to relax and find the centre.
11. Keep an eye on NILE, this is where you will be able to see any announcements, updates or changes to our guidance.
12. Reading tip – the assessment is based on the Royal Marsden, we advise (if you can) to read elements of this for reference purposes.
13. Make sure you prepare for your OSCE at the appropriate level, remember the OSCE is set at the level expected of nurses and midwives as they enter the profession.



## **Requirements for an employer sponsoring an overseas nurse or midwife**

If an employer wishes to sponsor a migrant in the standard occupational classification (SOC) code '2231 Nurses' or '2231 Midwives' as a pre-registration nurse or midwife they should ensure that the following steps have been completed by the migrant.

1. Language requirement – must have completed the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and achieved a minimum score of at least 7.0 in all areas within the last two years.
2. Practice requirement - must have practised as a registered nurse or midwife for at least 12 months (full time or the part-time equivalent) after qualifying. This post-registration experience must be relevant to the field of practice the applicant is applying for. Any practice that is not covered by registration cannot be considered for the requirement of 12-months post-registration experience.
3. Registration requirements - must hold a current registration or licence without restriction with the licensing authority or registration body in the country in which they qualified or have been practising.
4. Education requirements - must have successfully completed at least 10 years of school education before starting a post-secondary education nursing or midwifery training programme, leading to registration in their home country as an entry-level registered nurse or midwife.
5. Eligibility - must have completed the NMC's self-assessment of their eligibility and passed the eligibility assessment.
6. Test of competence – part one – must have sat the NMC's CBT and achieved the required minimum score.
7. Assessment stage – must have met the NMC's requirements for registration.

If the migrant passes the NMC's assessment stage, they will be invited to sit the OSCE in the UK. It is expected that the applicant's sponsorship by their employer will formally start from the date of the scheduled OSCE, with arrival permitted up to 14 days in advance.

If the applicant started their application before 6 April 2017, they have a maximum of two attempts (an initial sitting and a full or partial re-sit) to pass the OSCE with a minimum of 10 working days between the first and second try. The first try must have been completed no later than three months after the stated employment start date on their Certificate of Sponsorship (CoS). A face-to-face ID check will also take place at the OSCE location on the same day as the OSCE.

If the migrant fails the first OSCE attempt but arranges a re-sit and the employer still wants to sponsor them if they pass, the employer must tell UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) of their re-sit date via their Sponsorship Management System (SMS) account within 10 working days in line with its sponsorship duties.

If the migrant fails the ID check or their second OSCE attempt the employer must stop sponsoring them. The employer must tell the Home Office that its sponsorship of the individual has ended via its SMS account within 10 working days in line with its sponsorship duties.

If the migrant successfully completes the OSCE and the ID check, they will be invited by the NMC to complete their final declaration and payment for registration online. NMC registration must be achieved within eight months of the:

- stated employment start on the CoS - for CoS assigned to a migrant to support an initial Tier 2
- start date of the previous employment – for CoS assigned to a migrant who is currently sponsored to work as a nurse or midwife in Tier 2

The NMC will send the applicant their registration number (PIN). The employer must retain a copy of the individual's PIN notification.

The employer must tell the Home Office within 10 working days through its SMS account of the individual's full NMC registration, confirmation that the individual is now undertaking the role of a registered nurse and is being paid at least the appropriate rate for a Band 5 nurse or midwife.

If the migrant fails to complete their NMC final declaration and payment for registration online within the relevant eight month period, the employer must stop sponsoring the individual. The employer must tell the Home Office that its sponsorship of the individual has ended via its SMS account within 10 working days in line with its sponsorship duties.

The guidance for sponsors has not yet been updated to take account of the recent change announced by the NMC. The Home Office intend to amend this section of the guidance in the next update to reflect the fact that a third OSCE can now be made after three months. However, sponsor's responsibilities remain largely unchanged. If an applicant started their application from 6 April 2017, the employer is still required to notify UKVI if the applicant fails the OSCE on either the first or second attempt, and to confirm whether they are continuing to sponsor them and the date of any re-sit (once it is known). If it is no longer possible for the applicant to achieve NMC registration within eight months of starting work in Tier 2, then sponsorship must be withdrawn.

### **Support for employers in preparing candidates for the OSCE examination**

The test centre is offering Train the Trainer sessions to NHS trusts and agencies, once a month. This two day course at The University of Northampton will enable the employer to understand how the test is administered, what is expected of candidates and assessment criteria, assisting the employer in preparing its candidates for the OSCE examination. If the employer wants to find out more information on the sessions, they can email [ctc@northampton.ac.uk](mailto:ctc@northampton.ac.uk).

### **Employer stops sponsoring the overseas nurse or midwife**

If the migrant is already in the UK with entry clearance or leave to remain and their sponsor (employer) stops sponsoring them, UKVI will reduce (curtail) their leave. UKVI will curtail a migrant's leave as follows:

- to 60 days starting from the date the decision to curtail leave is made. The migrant may wish to make a further application for leave in another category or with another sponsor.
- with immediate effect, if the sponsor's licence was withdrawn and the Home Office consider that the migrant was complicit in the actions that resulted in the licence being withdrawn.

However, if any of the following apply to the migrant, it may affect the UKVI's decision to curtail a member's leave:

- they are under the age of 18;
- they have a dependent child under the age of 18;
- they have less than 60 days leave remaining where the intention is to curtail your leave;
- they have been granted leave to enter or remain with another sponsor or in another immigration category;
- they have an application for leave to remain or variation of leave pending with the Home Office or they have a pending appeal under section 82 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act;
- Their sponsor applies for a sponsor licence but is refused.

The migrant will be notified in writing of the immigration decision to restrict the limit on the duration of their leave.

### **Securing an alternative sponsor**

In some circumstances, it is possible for a migrant to apply to UKVI to remain in the UK where they have found alternative sponsorship. Migrants (and their dependants) whose sponsorship has been withdrawn should act as quickly as possible to submit an application for Leave to Remain if they intend to stay in the UK.

A migrant must make a successful application to vary their leave and/or their sponsor within the 60 days following curtailment. Failure to do so could severely affect any claim to settlement in the UK and may result in the migrant being subject to appropriate enforcement and removal action by UKVI.

### **Legal advice**

UNISON provides free immigration telephone advice to UNISON members who have come to work in the UK from countries outside of the European Union. We work with the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI) to provide this support. If the migrant has been a member of UNISON for more than four weeks and needs immigration advice and information, they can call UNISON Direct at 0845 355 0845. Their contact details will be passed on to a JCWI adviser who will call them on Tuesday, between 10am and 4pm.

## Further information

Registering as a nurse or midwife in the UK: for applicants trained outside the EU and EEA:  
<https://www.nmc.org.uk/globalassets/sitedocuments/registration/registering-as-a-nurse-or-midwife-from-outside-eu-or-eea2.pdf>

Tiers 2 and 5: guidance for sponsors:  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/606655/Tiers-2-and-5-guidance-for-sponsors-04-2017.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/606655/Tiers-2-and-5-guidance-for-sponsors-04-2017.pdf)

Tier 2 of the points based system – policy guidance:  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/571090/Tier\\_2\\_Policy\\_Guidance\\_11\\_2016.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/571090/Tier_2_Policy_Guidance_11_2016.pdf)

Approved OSCE test centres:

- University of Northampton: <http://www.northampton.ac.uk/about-us/services-and-facilities/nmc-test-of-competence/>
- Oxford Brookes University: <http://www.brookes.ac.uk/nmc-test-of-competence/about/>
- Ulster University: <https://www.ulster.ac.uk/faculties/life-and-health-sciences/nmc-competence-test-centre/about>

How to prepare for your OSCE examination:  
[http://www.northampton.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/How-to-prepare-for-the-OSCE\\_September-2016.pdf](http://www.northampton.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/How-to-prepare-for-the-OSCE_September-2016.pdf)

Candidate information booklet for the NMC's Test of Competence:  
<http://www.northampton.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/NMC-Test-of-Competence-Candidate-Information-Booklet-October-2016.pdf>